# The secret radio in concentration camp 1942–1945

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**Although a fair amount of information is available regarding the P.O.Ws in the military concentration camps very little is known of the civilian P.O.W. concentration camps in South East Asia.**

I was born and lived with my family for 14 years in Bandung (Indonesia) which was then part of the Dutch East Indies. My father was Chief Engineer of the Water and Electricity Supply in West Java. When the 2nd World War broke out it took the Japanese little time to conquer the Dutch East Indies. In 1942 all Dutch civilians were put in concentration camps, men separate from women and children. When boys reached the age of 14 years they were transferred to the men's camp and put in separate barracks on the same site as the men's barracks. During the last 6 months of the war the boys were isolated from the men. My total time in the concentration camp was 3 years, 2 years in the Tjihapit women's camp and 1 year in the old Dutch 15th Battalion men's camp. This story deals with the 15th Battalion concentration camp, which was formerly a military camp but during the war became a civilian concentration camp. Towards the later part of the war it had a total of 12000 civilian P.O.Ws.

## The "Secret Radio".

When I was all of 14 years old I was transferred to the 15th Battalion camp, I discovered to my surprise that my father was in that camp as well. With a bit of negotiating I was allowed to sleep next to my father instead of having to go to the boys camp because of his bad physical condition. After a while I was aware that there was a "Secret Radio" and my father knew about it, but he did not want to talk about it. Only a very few people knew about the birth of the "Secret Radio" and its use. At the time of the 15th Battalion camp becoming a civil P.O.W. camp a small workshop was installed under the direction of Mr. G.J. Vos, a brilliant man with a brilliant team, that could maintain, build and repair anything. The small workshop grew to a much bigger workshop, all sorts of things were manufactured, legal and illegal.

One day a Japanese guard entered the workshop with a radio that did not work anymore. He asked if the workshop could fix it for him. The answer was obvious, in no way could that radio be fixed anymore and, as a favour for him, they would throw the thing in the rubbish bin. Understanding the severity of that statement he quietly left. It took Mr. Vos and his expert team of Radio Engineers little time to work out the beginnings of a "Secret Radio".

Looking at the photographs will explain how it was done. The Radio Team designed a simple one valve receiver and a transmitter. It was built in metal boxes. Those metal boxes in turn were put in modified water flasks as used by the Japanese soldiers in the field. The water flasks were precisely copied and made by the engineering team of the workshop. Even the colour of the cloth cover of the flasks was very precisely matched. Apart from the few people who operated the gear nobody knew where transmitter and receiver were situated.

The receiver and transmitter worked perfectly right up to the end of the war and they were never discovered by the Japanese guards. It is interesting to note that, even with its extreme low power, contacts were made with radio amateurs in North Australia.

It is thanks to this radio that a select group was given the news from day to day and they then secretly whispered it to the rest of the prisoners. We knew


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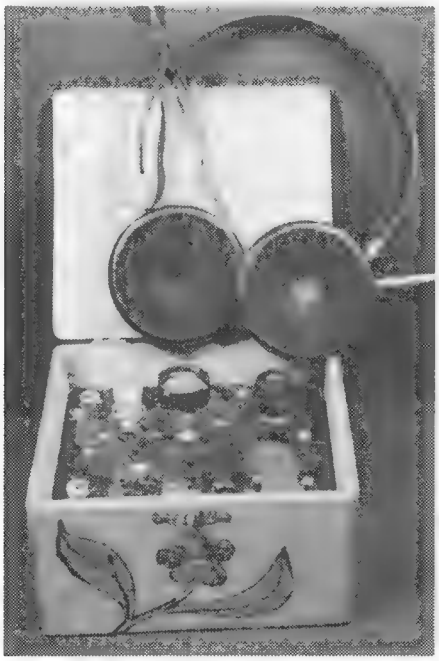

instantly of progress during the war, the dropping of the atom bomb on Hiroshima and finally the capitulation of Japan. Officially, nothing was said to the prisoners of the capitulation by the Japanese guards until a month later.

Mr. G.J. Vos survived the war. He brought back to the Netherlands the concentration camp "Secret Radio" he was so proud of. Many years ago he lent the "Secret Radio" to a firm for an exhibition. After many requests to return the radio, the firm refused to give it back. It was thanks to the stubborn nature of Mr. G. Schouten, close friend of Mr. G.J. Vos, that eventually the radio was returned to him while he was in hospital. Mr. Vos died a few days later. The "Secret Radio" is now with Mr. Schouten. It is thanks to him that I received the information and photographs I still needed.

I would also like to thank Mr. Jacque Slegtenhorst who helped me so much in my detective work. As for the Japanese guard, I hope he never reads this story if still alive!

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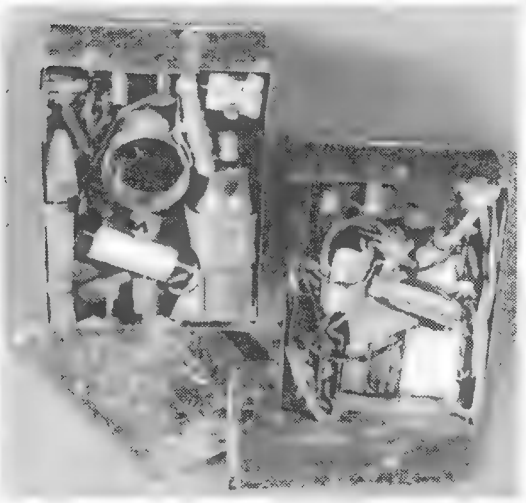

The secret camp radio various views.

## WIA Comment

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assessors and to become amateurs. After all that's what it's really all about.

But how is all really going to work? What happens to the existing Group Leaders and Invigilators? What happens to the current system where the papers are marked separately from the examination venue?

With our current system, a club may have nominated one or more Invigilators, one of whom is the WIA's primary contact as a Group Leader. The Group seeks examination material from the WIA Exam Service for named candidates at a forthcoming examination. The papers are returned to the WIA Exam Service for marking and the WIA Exam Service advises the candidates by mail of their result.

We hope that many of the current Invigilators will qualify as WIA Assessors.

But we also see these teams from the clubs assisting the Assessors in arranging Foundation courses, and examination "events" as they are called, helping conduct the examinations as they do today, which is why the Assessor Instructions I referred to above use so far as practicable the same instructions for the conduct of an amateur radio examination assessment by a WIA Assessor as are used for the present examinations.

Sure, as I say above, the practical assessment requires the assistance of a WIA Assessor, but for the Standard and Advanced certificates, the current system can continue, at least until all the clubs have at least one WIA Assessor.

That is why, for these first assessor-training courses, we have sought to ensure that the candidates are all supported by their clubs.

Once again, the WIA recognises the essential role of the clubs in making this new world of amateur radio a reality.

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